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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5443
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 9547
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000646

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, PM, AND EAP/MTS
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO AND J5
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (TOOLAN/BAILEY)
JOINT STAFF/J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/CLEMMONS)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [AU](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: INFORMAL U.S./AUSTRALIA/PHILIPPINE DEFENSE DIALOGUE

REF: MANILA 192

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Philippine Department of National Defense invited U.S. Embassy representatives to participate in a February 22 "informal discussion" with Australian officials on defense issues. Australia expects to sign a status of forces agreement with the Philippines in 2007 and hopes to explore greater participation in Balikatan and other exercises. The Australian Army Watercraft Project and Coast Watch South are two potential areas for tripartite cooperation. Pol/C expressed our appreciation for close partnership with each nation and trilaterally, but underscored that it was based on shared values, including respect for human rights, and called for additional measures by Philippine authorities to bring culprits engaged in extrajudicial killings to justice. We will actively seek out other opportunities for productive engagement on issues of mutual concern. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) The Department of National Defense invited POL/C and representatives of the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG)), Defense Attache's Office, and Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) to attend a February 22 "RP-U.S.-Australia informal discussion," which turned out to be primarily a joint briefing by Philippine and Australian officials following their latest round of bilateral defense talks. Australian Ministry of Defense First Assistant Secretary for International Policy Stephanie Foster chaired the Australian delegation.

"ENDURING TIES AND LASTING FRIENDSHIP"

13. (SBU) Philippine Undersecretary for Defense Affairs Antonio Santos framed the discussions by noting the robust U.S.-Philippine defense relationship and thanking the United States for its "enduring ties and lasting friendship." He explained that the Philippines and Australia had agreed at the conclusion of their talks to open their defense dialogue to a tripartite exchange to identify areas for collaboration.

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR TRIPARTITE COOPERATION

14. (SBU) A/S Foster stated that Australia and the Philippines were close to resolving the remaining issues surrounding a status of forces agreement, which could be signed later this year. Looking ahead, Australia hoped to

explore with the United States and the Philippines its participation in future Balikatan and other exercises. She cited as two potential areas of future U.S.-Australian cooperation with the Philippines as the Army Watercraft Project and Coast Watch South.

¶5. (SBU) Following an exchange of letters in 2006, Australia agreed to train and equip one company (the 11th Special Forces Company) of the Philippine Army's proposed Riverine Battalion with an Armed Forces of the Philippines commitment to supply the infrastructure and fuel for the new Cotabato-based force. The Australian Ministry of Defense expects to release the tender for the boats soon, with the goal of having the unit capable of operating in the marshlands of central Mindanao by year end 2007. The JSOTF-P commander observed that his forces had a robust presence in Cotabato working with the Philippine Army's 6th Infantry Division, and looked forward to cooperating with Australian counterparts.

¶6. (SBU) U.S., Australian, and Philippine representatives agreed that Coast Watch South offered opportunities to work together as the Philippines sought to upgrade its ability better to monitor its vulnerable maritime borders. Embassy Manila's Section 1206 proposals to establish a Maritime Security Force and to install high-frequency radios in existing and future Joint Interagency Task Force-West funded maritime interagency intelligence fusion centers would help make Coast Watch South more quickly operational by improving maritime interdiction, analysis, planning, coordination, and command and control capabilities. Australia's recently concluded Maritime Assistance Needs Analysis study could complement the U.S.-sponsored Border Control Needs Analysis in helping to identify areas for targeted assistance. All

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parties concurred that close coordination and active identification of areas of cooperation would serve mutual interests and ensure greater effectiveness of bilateral assistance programs.

CONCERNS ABOUT KILLINGS

¶7. (SBU) POL/C underlined to Philippine defense officials U.S. concerns about unexplained and extrajudicial killings, some of which have been allegedly committed by military personnel. He underscored that our shared future was based on shared values, including commitment to democracy and rule of law as well as respect for human rights. He welcomed Philippine efforts to confront the issue squarely and urged the Philippine government, including the armed forces, to do everything possible to bring all perpetrators to justice, regardless of who they were. U/S Santos responded that the Department of National Defense shared U.S. concerns, noting that then-Secretary of National Defense Cruz had issued firm policy guidance on the issue in October 2006. "We want to correct mistakes on the ground," Santos stated.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) This was the first time we had been invited to participate in the Philippine-Australian defense dialogue, and take it as a very positive sign about the willingness of our allies to pursue greater tripartite cooperation. Australia is one of our closest counterterrorism partners here, and we will actively seek out other opportunities for productive engagement on defense issues of mutual concern.

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